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ABSTRACT

In response to the expressed need for staff development and improved communication in a college, a 2-year program series was developed. The sessions included: valuing each other; supporting each other; motivation; how to get things done; decision making; and communicating student responsibility. The major focus of the sessions was on attendees becoming more familiar with each other. An evaluation was completed by each participant at the end of each session. This provided valuable information for the design and activities of the next workshop. Each workshop was built on the previous one. Evaluations at the end of the year revealed a greater appreciation for and understanding of the work of others. There was a desire to continue for another year, and to use other campus personnel to cover specific developmental topics. At the end of the second year the staff discussed past programs. The experience had been positive. A potential program for the coming year could not be designed so that staff were pleased with it. Consequently, the staff suggested the sessions end, except for periodic social gatherings. Success of the programs were due to topics and design of the sessions parallelling staff suggestions; administrators attending sessions and providing supporting resources; a clear agenda; an upbeat feeling with attendees learning about colleagues; and a overall design promoting learning and fun. (ABL)

STAFF DEVELOPMENT TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

ANALYSIS AND FIVE PROGRAMS

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION: ANALYSIS AND FIVE PROGRAMS

One of the most often heard responses to campus problems is "lack of communication." A frequently expressed need is "staff development." These two elements were addressed in a two year program series that included student personnel workers, and all other professional staff.

The professional staff told the new president that communication was a major campus problem. The president and staff made a commitment to work on the issue through a series of staff development activities. The staff entrusted the initial planning of the activities to the president and chief student affairs officer.

For the initial session an outside consultant was hired. During a one-half day summer session the issues were clarified; thus, the agenda for future sessions was clear. The evaluations of the first session revealed that the staff were not comfortable with a consultant and preferred an in-house facilitator for future sessions. The sessions for the first year were designed by the chief student affairs officer. The titles and order of the first year events were: valuing each other, supporting each other, motivation, how to get things done, decision making, and communicating student responsibility.

DESIGN OF SESSIONS

Each workshop was conducted in a similar manner. It was assumed that the 60 people did not know each other very well, thus the major focus was on becoming more familiar with each other. Sessions moved from a safe environment where individual exposure was not necessary to one where self-exposure was possible. Activities involving self-exposure were included with increased frequency as the year progressed.

Prior to any interaction people were asked to write an individual response as a way of having everyone take a position as opposed to piggy-backing what one heard and liked. No one was ever forced to share a response.

Individual responses were disguised through group reporting. It was assumed that the least threatening process was to work in pairs, with a person one knows. Small groups were formed by combining pairs. When small groups were built without the pair process they were reconstructed each time the activity changed.

The session generally started at 9 a.m. with coffee and juice in a room that had no seating. This was purposely done to encourage contact with other individuals while still drinking coffee. The program ended at noon at which time a simple lunch was available. Staff enjoyed the chance to discuss previously raised issues and to wind down in a relaxed manner.

An evaluation was completed by each participant at the end of each session. This provided valuable information for the design and activities of the next workshop. Each workshop built on the previous one.

DESIGNING A FOLLOW-UP YEAR

At the end of the first year the staff discussed the programs and provided written comments. The evaluations revealed a greater appreciation for and understanding of the work of others. Staff came to know each other in a deeper sense than ever before. There was a desire to continue for another year, and to use other campus personnel to cover specific developmental topics like time management, employee evaluation, stress management, AID's, supervising students, and confrontation. These sessions were scheduled for the following year. The facilitators were faculty and other staff as requested by the staff.

ENDING A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

At the end of the second year, the staff discussed the past programs. The experience had been positive. Communication had improved. The staff had developed some strong bonds. A potential program for the coming year could not be designed such that staff were pleased with it. Thus, the staff suggested the sessions end with the exception of periodic get togethers that would be more social in nature.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUCCESS

The staff wanted to have these gatherings. The topics and design of the sessions paralleled staff suggestions. There was no other forum for professional staff to get together. The president, vice presidents, and directors attended the sessiors and provided the supporting resources; they participated just as everyone else. An opportunity to interact with the president was especially appreciated. Dates were set for the year.

The agenda for each gathering was clear. No one was ever forced to say or reveal anything. People were made to feel good and left sessions with an upbeat feeling. Everyone learned something new and interesting about colleagues. At the sessions, staff learned from each other as opposed to through the facilitator. Programs were led by people they knew and respected. Above all the sessions were designed for both learning and fun. Frequently, participants enjoyed a good laugh.

FIVE STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

VALUING EACH OTHER

For there to be quality communication and a valuing of each other, staff have to know, appreciate and understand each others work. The session starts with a breakfast with tables of four staff, each from a different department. The discussion at each table focuses on items or issues that have the greatest impact on the offices represented at the table. Following breakfast, participants are asked to consider these questions:

1) What's another department doing that is important to your area?
2) What might a department do that could help your area?
3) What information does another area have that your area needs?

So that everyone can view each others thoughts, large pieces of paper for each department are mounted on the wall. Participants roam the room writing wherever they wish. The purpose of this part of the session is to have staff recognize the interdependences and realize the value of the work of other departments.

The second stage of the session focuses on the individual. Each person takes 10 minutes to write an answer to the following two questions:

1) What do colleagues do that tells you they respect and value you?
2) What's your way of telling people you respect and value them?

Staff then share their responses with someone not in their department. Pairs are combined for more discussion. Finally, in groups of eight, the responses are recorded on large newsprint so that all groups can review each others thoughts.

For the final activity people are given two sheets of paper and asked to respond to two questions:

1) What's the one thing to which you are going to pay more attention and which might strengthen your colleague's sense of value?
2) Write a short thank you to someone or office for something that has occurred in the past four months.

These responses are posted on the wall for all to read.

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER

Valuing and supporting are both dependent upon knowing an individual. The session starts with each individual writing on an index card five important characteristics that someone should know about them. Participants are then directed to share that information with five other people with whom they have had little association. This activity is followed by a game. Six signs, each with an animal's name (cat, owl, fox, turtle, bear, dog) are posted. Participants are asked "which one of these animals do you have the most difficulty communicating with?" The final question in reference to the animals is: "which one of these is it easiest for you to communicate with?" Following the presentation of each question participants join a discussion group of the animal they selected, discuss their reasons for selection, and report the general nature of the group's discussion to all participants.

The final session of the program considers the question: "How do we go about supporting each other?" This question is divided into three parts, each addressed in the same manner. Each individual is asked to write a response to a question. With a response in hand, staff form foursomes of those who have similar responses.

Following a discussion period they record and post their responses. Each foursome finds another that has a different orientation. The groups of eight discuss their differences. The three parts of the question are:

1) What kind of support do I want and when and where do I need it:
2) What is it that I do in my daily work that will communicate to people (students included) with whom I interact that I support my colleagues?
3) What interaction will I have with colleagues that says I respect, value, and support them?

Following this all participants gather to discuss "affirmation," that state where someone makes a comment which one may not agree with or question its accuracy, but to which one does not reply. The group concluded silence communicates support.

As the final activity each person takes a piece of large newsprint and writes down what really "pushes their button" (angers them, makes them upset) and what really makes them feel good. These are posted for all to read with healthy chuckles.

MOTIVATION

The focus of this session is on individual as opposed to group motivation. The first activity begins with each person writing down a list of conditions that are motivating. These are shared and discussed individually with six other people of ones choice. Those who have similar conditions form groups which report out to the total group. The second question is "what can you do to motivate?" The design of the group activity for addressing this question is the same as that for the first question. Additionally, this last group explores the relationship between the responses to the two questions.

In the second activity, small groups of six to eight discuss the question: "from your observation, what works against motivation at the institution." Each group identifies "the What", determines "under whose control", and makes a 'suggested change." The work of each group is posted for all to read.

Next the groups are reformulated to discuss:

1) What responsibilities do I have for motivation at the institution?

2) Toward whom should my motivational activities be directed?

The final activity is a small group discussion of the question: "for what part of your own motivation are you responsible?" The session ends with each individual in the group talking about what was motivating in the past week and making a commitment to an action that would motivate at least one other person.

HOW TO GET THINGS DONE

Each individual has a unique set of means by which they go about getting things done. The environment in which one works has an impact. This workshop helps professionals understand these two elements.

Each individual writes five personal characteristics that help them get things done and five environmental conditions which assist them. These are then shared with another person. After some discussion, pairs join to form groups of four and following more dialogue groups of eight are arranged and, at the activity's end, report to the total group.

Next, eight sources of power for getting things done are posted. The participants select the one that reflects their greatest source of power and discuss their reasons for selecting the topic. These sources are: my ability to express myself (written or oral), my assertiveness/persistence, my commitment/desire, my ability to motivate others (interact cooperatively), my access to resources, my confidence in my thinking/ideas, my ability to control others, and my ability to reward others. This activity provides staff with information about individual staff members and how they go about their daily work.

In completing a task, one faces many dilemmas which need resolution; for example, the issue that "others can be viewed as trustworthy allies", or at the other end of the spectrum, "others are competitors to be on guard against." Another example includes: "to seek explanation or clarification" or "second guess; to stay in the dark on purpose."

Eight dilemmas are posted. Participants are asked to determine their place on the spectrum for each dilemma. Individuals compare scale patterns for the eight items in order to find someone with a similar response to the dilemmas. The pairs find a second pair with a similar pattern. The group of four discuss:

1) reasons for their choices;
2) the dilemmas that help one get things done or work against getting things done;
3) the relation between their responses to the sources of power question and the dilemmas.

The final activity addresses the environment factors which contribute to feelings of power or powerlessness. The assumption is that if one cannot feel a sense of power in a situation then it is difficult to get anything done. A list of fourteen factors of power are distributed. Some examples from the list include:

1) low information control to high information control
2) low turf protection to high turf protection

The highs and lows are placed at opposite ends of a one to ten scale. After completing the handout, groups of six are formed and 3 items from the list are assigned for discussion. Each group reports on the essence of its discussion.

The groups continue to use the power/powerless scale, but are asked to determine the general institution posture on each item. The subsequent discussion focuses on what causes the college to be where it is and what can be done to improve the situation. As a concluding activity each person writes something learned that would help in getting things done more easily in the future. These are posted for all to read.

DECISION MAKING

How does one go about making decisions? Everyone does it differently; different elements affect each individual in a variety of ways. An understanding of each others characteristics that surround decision making is needed.

Each person is given eight cards, each with a decision making characteristic. The participants trade cards (1 for 1) in order to collect traits reflective of them and to get rid of traits unlike them. Examples of traits on the cards are:

1) consultation	4) use intuition
2) hardliner	5) vacillator
3) softy	6) rely on groups

This gives staff a sense of each other in relation to decision making.

Small groups are formed so people can talk about themselves as decision makers. The following nine words are placed on the wall:

1) dousing rod	6) cupid
2) hurricane	7) woodpecker
3) ostrich	8) beaver
4) snake	9) fireman
5) lion	

Participants are asked to select a name that best represents them as a decision maker and form a group. Each group reports after a discussion which includes an analysis of the relation between their choice of a name and what they traded.

The third part of this session is based on the premise that in any decision making situation there is a greatest influence. Again nine phrases which reflect influence on decisions are posted. These phrases are:

1) Impact on others
2) Data
3) Human feelings
4) What my department expects
5) Political ramifications
6) Precedent it sets
7) What the decision will communicate to others
8) My knowledge of what is right and wrong
9) Avoid conflict

Participants select the title that best represents them as decision maker. The group members discuss their choice and the traits they traded.

The final session asks people to think about how decisions might vary depending on the level of the decision maker. The purpose is to develop an appreciation of what staff at various levels have to consider in making decisions. Groups of eight are formed such that there is at least one of each of the following:

1) a staff member
2) a director who supervises
3) a supervisor of directors

Each person is given a set of sixteen scales to complete. Two examples are:

1) overall impact on the individual versus the institution
2) internal versus external issues

The question posed for each scale is where on this continuum do you fall when you make a decision as a:

1) staff person
2) director
3) supervisor of directors
4) president

Participants discover that their positions vary with the level of the decision maker. Participants representing the different levels are able to discuss what they have to consider in their decisions and why a decision may change as it moves up the chain of command.

For the finale of this session, the whole group came together for a discussion led by the president. This provided a unique opportunity to understand the decision making process at that level.